# Educational in the united states and Nigeria: policies and advocacy, and inclusion of children with disabilities

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#### ABSTRACT

The world is now a developed, modern village, and countries around the world are borrowing a leaf from other countries' policies. This paper presents a picture of the inter-locking relationships between the United States of America's educational policies and the Nigeria's educational policies and early childhood education. This paper looks at education in the United States and that of Nigeria, viz-a-vis, its differences and similarities. This paper also looks at the inclusion of children with disabilities in education of both countries.

#### 1. Introduction

Education is the bedrock of any nation's development. It plays greater role to foster the development of a nation's future leaders, as an investment in education, is an investment in the future of a country. Through an investment in education, governments, organizations NGOs, and the community can be sure of the future of the tomorrow child. Most developing countries borrow ideas and practices from cross section of countries that are considered developed. These developing nations model the educational practices of these developed nations. Nevertheless, there still exist some huge differences in terms of how the borrowed ideas are formulated and implemented. In line of this, we are going to look at educational practice in two separate systems; the developed system (United States of America), and the developing system (Nigeria), with the aim of drawing a comparison between these systems. We will be comparing the American educational practice with the Nigerian educational practice, in terms of their educational policies and advocacy, and their inclusion of children with disabilities.

# 2. Educational practices in the United States

#### A brief overview

Education in the United States is provided by both the public and private schools. In the United States, emphasis is placed on early childhood education with policy makers enacting laws to foster early childhood education. Prior to higher education, children in the United States attend preschool, primary and secondary school, spanning from Pre-K, 1st grade to 12th grade. At about age six, children begin primary school, which is mostly referred to as "elementary school" and then progress to secondary school after five or six years. The secondary school is made up of two stages, the first being the junior school or "middle school" which is the first three years, and then the "higher school, which is the last three years.

The United States spends more per student on education than any other country. According to National Centre for Educational Statistics (2015);

In 2011, the United States spent \$11,841 per full-time-equivalent (FTE) student on elementary and secondary education, an amount 35 percent higher than the OECD average of \$8,789. At the postsecondary level, U.S. expenditures per FTE student were \$26,021, almost twice as high as the OECD average of \$13,619.

(National Centre for Educational Statistics, 2015)

This indicator uses material from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report to compare countries' expenditures on education. But surprisingly, the United States ranks 14th in the world in cognitive skills and educational attainment, while Pacific Asian countries and regions dominates the top rankings (National Centre for Educational Statistics, 2015). According to a report commissioned by Pearson, the multinational education company, this ranking is attributed to the U.S. college completion rate which greatly affected its ranking. Completion rates are 50 percent in comparison to 90 percent in countries like the United Kingdom (Molnar, 2014).

# **United States educational policies**

In the United States, there have been collaborations between early childhood professionals and political office holders who are the policy makers, to produce educational policies that can better the lives of the average American child. Policy makers work with individuals, as well as advocacy groups at the grassroots level to meet their pressing needs in the community (Reutzel, 2013).

Policy makers are still currently formulating educational policies to better the lives of the average American child. Some policies are sometimes met with uncertainty, as parties to the implementation of these policies may differ in their interpretation or may differ in some clauses. For example, the House of Senate and House of Representatives each passed their own bills to reauthorize ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) back in July, 2015. Because the two versions of the bill differed considerably, after months of uncertainty, in mid-November, 2015, both parties decided to "move forward" on the long awaited reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In December, 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (American Educational Research Association, 2016).

Early childhood professionals are often encouraged to speak out and collaborate with policy makers on the creation of a conducive condition in the society to better the life of children and their families. In line of this, the

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) established The Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment (2011) to encourage early childhood professional advocacy as an ethical responsibility to those working in the profession (Reutzi, 2013).

# 3. Educational practices in Nigeria

#### A brief overview

Much of the educational practices in Nigeria are a model of the British and the United States educational system. Education in Nigeria is the shared responsibility of both the local, state, and federal governments. The federal government is more directly involved with tertiary education. Secondary education is in some extent controlled by the state government, while the primary education is controlled by the local government (World Education News and Review, 2016). The Federal Ministry of Education regulates, controls and formulates policies for the nation's educational system. States Ministries of Education also control and formulates policies for the secondary and primary schools within the state, but do this to compliment federal government's policies. In the northern region of Nigeria, there is a separate type of school which is optional for those within that region. It is called "the Alamajiri schools", which is more like an Islamic school, and it caters for the predominantly Islamic dwellers in that region. To cater for the nomadic cattle rearers who frequently move from place to place in search of greenland to feed their cattle, which makes the integration of their children into conventional school difficult, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced a new form of education for the nomads called, "nomadic education" (Adeyemi, Oribabor, & Adeyemi, 2012; Nigeria Education and Research development Council, 2014).

Nigeria operates what she calls the "6-3-3-4 system of education". This means six years for primary school, three years for junior secondary school, three years for senior secondary school, and four years for university. Below is an elaborate breakdown of the "6-3-3-4" system in line with the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program.

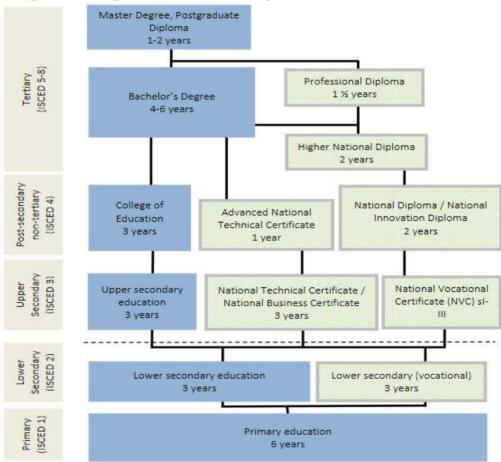


Figure 1: The Nigerian 6-3-3-4 Education System Chart

Source: UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2019

#### Nigeria educational policies

In Nigeria, there has been less emphasis on early childhood education. Most children start school from primary one, when they are about five to six years old. But recently, some educational scholars have been advocating the importance of early childhood education, and this has made the Federal Ministry of education to propose the "1-6-3-3-4" system of education. The first year being one year for kindergarten.

Educational policies in Nigeria have passed through two major important stages; the colonial and post-

independence era (Imam, 2012). The urgent need for a national policy on education came to focus during the first National Curriculum Conference held in 1969. The outcome of the conference and subsequent meetings, led to a final document, The National Policy on Education, which was first published in 1977(1st edition) and later updated in 1981(2nd edition), 1998(3<sup>rd</sup> edition), 2004(4<sup>th</sup> edition), 2007(5<sup>th</sup> edition), and 2013(6<sup>th</sup> edition). The National Policy on Education (NPE) is the national guideline for the effective administration, management and implementation of education at all tiers of government aimed at providing quality education delivery in Nigeria (Nigeria Education and Research development Council, 2014).

According to The Guide (2013), innovations and changes included in the National Policy on Education include:

- a) The lifting of the suspension order on Open and Distance Learning Program by Government;
- b) Revitalization and expansion of the National Mathematical Centre (NMC);
- c) Establishment of Teachers Registration Council (TRC);
- d) Introduction of information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the school curriculum
- e) Prescription of French Language in the primary and secondary schools, curriculum as second official language;
- f) Prescription of minimum number of subject to taken be by Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) candidates:
- g) The integration of basic education in the program of "Quaranic schools" or "Alamajiri schools", to ensure equal opportunity and effective implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE);
- h) Repositioning science, technical and vocational education in the scheme of national educational for optimum performance; and
- i) General contextual change to reflect the state of professional practice in education, among others.

#### 4. Inclusion of children with disabilities

# The Nigeria experience

For years in Nigeria history, not much attention was given to the education of children with disabilities. Much of the education for children with disabilities, were carried out by Christian missionaries and private organizations, and they could only cater for a handful (Agunloye, 2011). Children with disabilities were mainly abandoned at home with no form of education. It was after the Nigeria civil war (1967-1969) which left casualties with disabilities that little attention was then given to the issue of special education. This led to the establishment of special education programs in the University of Ibadan in 1974, University of Jos in 1977, and the Federal Advanced Teachers College, Special (FATC) in 1977 (Garuba, 2003).

Inclusive education is a term that seems new to majority of Nigerians. In actual sense, inclusive education has been a light subject of discussion for policy makers for years, and this consideration has since been noted in the provision of Section 8 of the National Policy on Education 1977, and has provided support mechanisms for children with disabilities (Oboegbulem & Eskay, 2013). Sadly, policy makers in Nigeria have not given much needed attention to the course of inclusive education despite its presence in the National Policy on Education, and the decree of 1993. In spite of the Nigerian government being a member of the United Nations education on human rights and child right, yet she has not paid much attention to the need for every child to be free, have leisure and play and be protected from harmful practices, violence, injury, and abuse in an inclusive setting (Oboegbulem & Eskay, 2013). In terms of policy provision, it can be said that special education has fared better. But in terms of the implementation of the policy declarations, very little success has been recorded in the actualization of the programs that are part of the nation's education policy (Garuba, 2003).

# **United States experience**

The need to cater for children with disabilities in the United States can be traced back to the 1800s when children with disabilities were segregated for instruction in public schools, as education professionals and parents called for more equitable treatment of these students, and for closer contact with their nondisabled peers (Osgood, 2005). Special education actually gained momentum in the 1960s during the era of President John F. Kennedy whose interest in special education was derived largely from personal considerations, as his sister, Rosemary had been identified as mentally retarded, and the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation, named in honor of his brother, had been supporting research in mental retardation for some time before his election (Osgood, 2005). Since then, there have been series of laws and provisions for children with special needs. Among the earlier laws were the 1958 PL 85-905, which authorized loan services for captioned films for the deaf, and PL85-926, which provided federal support for training teachers for children with mental retardation; The National Defense Education Act, also passed during the 85th Congressional session, allowed greater opportunity to develop "categorical support for education of the handicapped" (Osgood, 2005).

More recently, there have been laws that have revolutionized the issue of inclusion of young children with disabilities and they include; The No Child left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which promises a quality education for every K-12 students, including children with disabilities, and the Individual with Disability Education Act (IDEA), which has provided children with disabilities to enjoy full access to educational opportunities (International Bureau of Education, 2008).

# 5. Nigeria versus United States, a comparison

Looking at the United States educational system and the Nigeria educational system, we can draw a list of

some differences and similarities between the practices obtainable in these two systems in terms of educational policy/advocacy, and inclusion of children with disabilities.

Table 1: Differences between the United States and Nigeria

United States	Nigeria
US family and medical leave Act of 1994. Under this	Labour Act of 1990. Under this provision, women
provision, employees are able to take an unpaid, job	employees are provided with a fifty percent of their
protected leave for a specific period of time, usually 12	wages and job protection for a period of six months as
weeks for maternity and paternity leave when a baby is	maternity leave. However, the issue of paternity leave is
born or adopted. This law has had a profound effect on	still an ongoing subject of discussion, and the this law
children and their families (Reutzel, 2013)	also except parents who adopt babies (Labour Act 1990)
In the United State, the federal role in education is	In Nigeria, education is the collective effort of the
limited because of the tenth amendment which stipulates	federal, state, and local government, with the federal
that "The powers not delegated to the United States by	government exerting stronger influence on educational
the Constitution, not prohibited by it to the States, are	policies across the various states. The national policy on
reserved to the States respectively, or to the people"	Education, drafted at the federal level, is the framework
(National Constitution Center, n.d.). So, the federal	that governs the administration of education at all levels.
government does not establish or govern educational	
institutions, as this is the responsibilities of the states	
Advocacy for emphasis on Early Childhood education	In Nigeria, low emphasis is placed on early childhood
and increase in funding is more visible in the United	education, and the advocacy by educational
States.	professionals is very low.

Table 2: Similarities between the United States and Nigeria

Table 2. Similar ties between the United States and Nigeria	
United States	Nigeria
The United States, which is a developed nation, operate	Nigeria as a developing nation sees the United States as
a robust and progressive system of education	a model and copies most of the educational practices.
The United States operate a grade system of education	This is similar to the Nigeria 6-3-3-4 system of
$(1^{st} \text{ grade} - 12^{th} \text{ grade})$ . That is elementary $(1^{st} - 6^{th})$	education. That is the primary school (6 years), junior
grade), middle-school (7 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> grade), and high-school	secondary school (3 years), and senior secondary school
$(10^{th} - 12^{th} \text{ grade}).$	(3 years).
Presence of established laws that addresses inclusive	In Nigeria, there exist laws and provisions to cater for
education for children with disabilities. For example,	the inclusion of children with disabilities. For example,
The NCLB (No Child Left Behind) Act of 2001, and	the 1993 decree for the provision of inclusive education
IDEA (Individual with Disabilities Education Act) 2004.	with clear and comprehensive legal protection and
	security backing (Oboegbulem & Eskay, 2013), and the
	National Policy on Education which stipulates quality
	education for every child, including children with
	disabilities.

# 6. Conclusion

The United States educational system is clearly ahead of that of Nigeria, but Nigeria has been emulating the US, and sometimes from other counties like Britain for a long time. Nigeria has robust educational policies, but its implementation is often faulty. As observed from the practice of both countries, it can be said that Nigeria can rise to the pinnacle of educational attainment, if her formulated policies are readily and correctly implemented. Most educational policies are well focused but the planning is often defective, making implementation difficult. Nigeria can still learn a lot from the American educational practice in terms of policy formulation and implementation, advocacy and the inclusion of children with disabilities.

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